PREFACE

Feminist scholarship has long recognized the provisional nature of its hypotheses; changing contexts have moved us to new inquiries. The essays in this issue ask new questions in several fields as they consider the relationship of gender to both the body and the body politic.

We begin this issue with a cluster of works on women's bodies in health and illness that question the very definitions of such terms and interrogate their applications in masculinist science and feminist thought. Our opening essay, Susan E. Bell's "Gendered Medical Science: Producing a Drug for Women," uses early data on diethylstilbestrol (DES), the first synthetic estrogen, which was first used experimentally in the United States as a treatment for symptoms of menopause. By analyzing questionnaires distributed to physicians participating in clinical research before the 1940s, Bell is able to show the way in which medical science read women's symptoms not as side effects of DES but as signs of a menopausal pathology, thereby constructing female physiology through a paradigm of illness for which DES became not a danger but a cure. At a time when estrogen replacement therapies are under discussion, Bell's research suggests the complex interactions between medicine and social discourse that continue to structure both research and personal lives.

The far-reaching, gendered consequences of drug therapies are also the subject of Judith Kegan Gardiner's "Can Ms. Prozac Talk Back? Feminism, Drugs, and Social Constructionism." Gardiner explores the discourses surrounding drugs that treat depression and anxiety. Her purpose is not to evaluate such therapies either scientifically or ideologically; she is interested in both the public discourses that link feminism to Prozac and the implications of biochemical treatment for feminist theories of identity and change. Most importantly, Gardiner raises the disturbing challenge that drug therapies pose to "constructionist" theories of self. Feminists have tended to dismiss biologically based theories as "essentialist," given the reactionary social implications of most biologically based policies. Yet the seemingly effective use of Prozac-like drugs by women, many of whom are feminists, suggests the need for revisions in feminist thinking about the relationship between biology and society.

The gender politics of medicine and the social meanings of the female body are also implicated in the epidemic of breast cancer we are currently witnessing. Fiction writer Frances Webb and sculptor Nancy Fried have contributed to this issue powerful renderings of the physical and psychic aftermath of breast cancer and mastectomy. Fried talks of her work as a "visual journal" dealing with "loss and regeneration, anger, grief, and hope," words that also lace their way through Webb's "Four Stories" as her protagonist struggles to face her body in its new shape. In effect, Webb's middle-aged character seeks the place from which the single-breasted body can stand "proud and tall," as Nancy Fried says of her middle-aged images with their wrinkles, fat, and scars. Fried writes that "the fact that these torsos have only one breast" has become "incidental to the content of the work." In this way the normal body is reimaged and redefined.

The gendered and ill body is differently implicated in the tragic case of Bridget Cleary, burned to death on her sickbed in 1895 because her husband believed she had gone off with the fairies and left a changeling in her place. Rereading this story in the context of a gender-charged colonialism, Angela Bourke shows the ways in which Bridget Cleary's death was rewritten in terms of Anglo-Irish relations both legal and cultural, in which "Erin" becomes constructed as the helpless woman who must be saved from the Irish "Fenian" male by the matron "Britannia." This context, imposed on an impoverished Ireland in tension between tradition and modernity, made Bridget and Michael Cleary vulnerable in both shared and different ways. Bourke also explores the possibilities of physical illness and psychological resistance that, intersecting with fairy lore, may have led not only to Michael Cleary's murder of his wife but also to the complicity of some friends and family, and to the leniency of the British-ruled courts. In reading Bridget Cleary's death, Bourke creates a rich portrait of gender, class, and cultural relations in colonial Ireland.

The Victorian Empire furnishes the ground as well for Susan Brown's study of Anna Leonowens, who served as governess to the court of King Mongkut of Siam and furnished the model for the popular U.S. musical, *The King and I*. Deconstructing the monolithic notion of the Victorian travel writer,

Brown shows the ways in which Leonowens, herself a colonial rather than a "proper" English woman, resists the "missionary position" of conventional travel writing in her representations of the Siamese court. Although Leonowens inevitably participates in certain imperialist practices, she also rejects both Christianizing and Anglicizing discourses and with them the assumed hierarchy of European civilization over Asian cultures and beliefs.

Both Bourke and Leonowens suggest the ways in which gender underpins state values–and the state in turn constructs the gendered body–in the British Empire of the nineteenth century. The final entries in this issue of *Feminist Studies* consider from the vantage points of different national and geographical settings the ramifications of political change for women's lives and works. In an interview conducted in 1992 by Elaine Upton, Lindiwe Mabuza, poet and chief representative of the African National Congress in the United States, discusses the joint struggles for Black liberation and women's liberation in South Africa. Mabuza's large-hearted vision links stories of her South African grandmother with finding voice as a writer while working in the Black community of Minneapolis; the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and racism in the United States with the worldwide struggle of women. Black South African women, until very recently, have not had the time or the means to be writers. As they begin to speak, they draw inspiration from African American women writers and, like them, force a recognition of the interactive nature of multiple oppressions. Mabuza recognizes that the "psychology of oppression distorts how people should interact with each other, and so you accept the absurd and the obscene." Yet she also radiates hope for a capacious ideal of feminist possibility.

Mabuza's recognition of the imbrication of social and sexual politics is paralleled in Maxine Molyneux's review essay on the position of women in the former Soviet bloc. Recognizing both the similarities and specificities of different national situations, Molyneux explores the impact on Eastern European women of democratization and capitalism, with their attendant mixed blessings of job opportunity and job loss, emerging feminism and threatened masculinity. Noting that many of the costs of change have been borne by women, Molyneux calls for

further research to understand and address the conditions in Eastern European nations.

Hideko Nornes Abe also calls for an expanded research agenda with regard to the study of Japanese women's speech. "From Stereotype to Context: The Study of Japanese Women's Speech" is at once a review of the status of Japanese feminist linguistics and an overview of the "women's language" that has existed in Japan for almost a millennium. Abe explores the theoretical assumptions about both gender and language that structure the study of Japanese and provides a valuable comparison with U.S. language scholarship. In the process, she questions entrenched assumptions about the value of specific language acts–and silences–and points to the importance of a contextual reading of language use.

Each of these essays reminds us that feminism, and the status of women, translate uneasily across cultures and states and that the position of women is always–but differently–implicated in social change. In this year of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, we are thus reminded of both the importance of cross-national connection and of the specificities that each nation and culture must face if there is to be a global transformation of women's–and men's–lives, a transformation to physical health in the body and the body politic.

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for the editors